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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 005802

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SUBJECT: SE TURKEY LEADERS WANT POSITIVE RESPONSE TO PKK  
CEASE-FIRE

Classified By: ADANA PRINCIPAL OFFICER ERIC GREEN FOR REASONS 1.4 (B),  
(D)

[1](#)1. (U) This is a Consulate Adana Cable.

Summary

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[1](#)2. (C) Kurdish and regional GOT leaders in SE Turkey are hopeful the PKK cease-fire will de-escalate the violence, but worried that Ankara will not capitalize on the opportunity, which they believe offers an opening for serious, long-range political engagement with Turkey's Kurds. Local leaders were especially concerned that the security forces could veto any possible moves by the civilian government to relax restrictions on Kurdish cultural rights or produce an amnesty package. While Diyarbakir Provincial Governor Ala and city mayor Baydemir both favor seeking a long-term compromise to the Kurdish issue, other local leaders (from both sides) remain attached to older policies of confrontation and denial. End summary.

PKK Cease-fire: What Next?

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[1](#)3. (C) On September 26-29, Adana PO and Ankara PolCouns visited Diyarbakir, Batman and Bingol to meet with municipal and GOT officials as well as representatives of NGOs. Although the PKK had not yet announced its cease-fire while we were in the region, all our interlocutors were confident it would happen and tailored their comments accordingly. Our sources attributed the PKK move to pressure from the grassroots, who deal with the fallout from higher levels of tension created by the current terrorist campaign. They also link it to the dynamics of Northern Iraq, where the Kurdish-run administration is stating it will not tolerate PKK activity there. Seymus Diken, a Diyarbakir writer and advisor to Mayor Baydemir, said that Iraqi President Talabani addressing the UNGA -- in Kurdish -- was a huge emotional marker for Turkey's Kurds and that it weakened the PKK, which had previously dismissed Talabani as a "feudal" chief.

¶4. (C) Mayor Osman Baydemir, who was involved in the roll-out of the DTP announcement urging the PKK to call a cease-fire, said it is essential that the GOT respond with initiatives, such as a new amnesty law, lowering the election threshold or increasing broadcasting rights, to demonstrate that there is progress on the Kurdish issue. "We need a roadmap," he said, so each side can plan its actions and work toward a common goal of defusing the conflict. Baydemir acknowledged that it would be very difficult for the government to cede on these issues during the run-up to next year's election.

¶5. (C) Similarly, Governor Efkan Ala believed that after a cease-fire declaration the GOT should step up its efforts to deal with the Kurdish problem. He volunteered that indirect negotiations with the PKK might be possible, using parties in Northern Iraq, for example, as intermediaries. (Ala did not mention the DTP as able to play this role.) Ala also suggested that the U.S. could also participate in pushing for a long-term political solution to the Kurdish question. He said the U.S. could work through the MFA and noted that FM Gul is "sensible" on these issues.

But the Security Services are Obstacles  
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¶6. (C) Ala lamented that as long as violence continues, it will be difficult to accelerate the pace of change on issues such as broadcasting. He also complained that civilian officials are often undercut by the security forces in

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handling the Kurdish issue. Baydemir was blunt on this subject, saying that the key now is to influence the security forces, not the politicians. Baydemir and others worried that the recent outspoken comments by senior military leaders signaled an intention to resist any political initiatives.

Amnesty is Key Issue  
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¶7. (C) Several human-rights activists and bar association officials, who are not DTP members but are in touch with the grass-roots, identified amnesty as a critical issue, since allowing the thousands of PKK fighters to return home would have a huge effect on public opinion. Under current rules, PKK militants are permitted to surrender to the authorities but are then under intense pressure to provide information useful for counter-insurgency operations. As a result, those who turn themselves in are regarded with suspicion once they try to return to society.

Moderation is not a Universal Sentiment  
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¶8. (C) Many of our interlocutors -- notably the NGO and political community in Diyarbakir -- displayed a high level of political maturity in relating the Kurdish issue to the broader context of Turkey's national politics. They recognized that nationalists in western Turkey are using the on-going terrorist campaign to weaken the government, which will make progress on the Kurdish issue even harder. In the SE itself, leaders remain who are also attached to policies of confrontation and/or denial. The DTP mayor of Batman, Huseyin Kalkan, praised the PKK as "freedom fighters" who are "solely responsible" for any progress that the Kurdish cause has achieved in recent years. Asked about fighters coming home, he said that if his son was in the mountains, he would not welcome him home unless the PKK released him from

duty. Meanwhile, in Bingol, the AK Party mayor Haci Ketenalp (himself a Kurd), sounding like an echo of ten years ago, claimed that there is "no Kurdish issue" in Turkey. While these officials are not making policy, their positions suggest they represent ever present strains of opinion that would be obstacles to compromise.

Comment  
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19. (C) Leaders with common sense from civil society and regional government recognize that the current alignment of forces is pushing the PKK to stand down, at least temporarily. They also believe that the national government needs to respond positively to the cease-fire in order to maintain momentum in moving the conflict from violence into the realm of peaceful politics. An offer to reintegrate rank-and-file PKK fighters (perhaps those whose only crime is membership) back into society would be, they believe, the best way to develop such momentum, as it would affect thousands of families wanting their relatives to return safely while further eroding the PKK's ability to fight and recruit. Apart from the politically difficult amnesty issue, the GOT could also move the process forward by following up on PM Erdogan's ground-breaking acknowledgement of Turkey's Kurdish problem 13 months ago with another high-profile gesture to lend official recognition to Kurdish identity by, for example, relaxing broadcasting restrictions or making a run at lowering the election threshold to give Kurdish parties a better chance of competing nationally.

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